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## RICHARD COSWAY, "THE MACARONI MINIATURE PAINTER."

ENGLISH miniature painting reached its apogee in the eighteenth century and Richard Cosway. No pencil before or since has had quite the delicacy and swift certainty of his, and few artists have ever had his peculiar elegance in water-color drawing and his refined appreciation of fashionable female beauty. His work in his time was declared to be not so much fashionable as fashion itself, and he was said to have painted more miniatures for exchange between affianced lovers than any other artist who ever lived. His art in giving brightness to eyes where none existed, and glow to lips and cheek whence all glow had faded, or where it had never been, while yet securing exact likenesses, made portraits by him particularly desirable when a sitter sought to produce a charming effect upon another's imagination. He painted all the beau monde of his time, and his miniatures, being thus both family portraits and treasures of the cabinet, very rarely find their way to sales or exhibitions; hence the artist is less known to our generation than many others of less merit. The number of his miniatures was almost incredibly large. He had such facility, and his sitters were so numerous and pressing, that he often painted exquisitely finished portraits in three sittings of half an hour each, and would boast at dinner-time that he had despatched through the day twelve or fourteen sitters.

The finest and the largest collection of Cosway's miniatures, without doubt, is that of Mr. Edward Joseph, of 158 New Bond Street, London. During a recent visit to London, the writer procured photographs of the examples illustrated herewith, selected from a group of no less than seventy.

The portraits in this collection, all richly set with precious stones in solid gold frames, are a possession fit for a prince. They are indeed priceless, so far as the owner is concerned; for their accumulation has been one of the great pleasures

of his life, and, although a dealer, he assured the writer that he had no intention of selling them. One of them he did give

away recently, however—the smallest one on this page—one of the most beautiful of the collection. Mr. Joseph has two of the miniatures painted for Prince George at the height of the artist's favor with him. One of these is of the Prince himself, flattered into the beauty of a Prince Florizel by every susceptibility of ivory and lustrous color. His complexion is ivory, his cheeks rose-pink, his eyes sparkling, his hair snowy, and his air insouciant and jaunty as that of a fairy



MINIATURE BY COSWAY.  
LADY EGLINTON.

prince. The other is of Mrs. Robinson, the actress, the beautiful Perdita whom the wicked prince used so ill. Such an exquisitely delicate yet healthful face was never seen except on Cosway's ivories. Her hair is piled high and powdered into the fleecy lightness of muslin or lace, her eyes are like liquid gems, and the airy, graceful drapery of her bust shows the rare taste in which Cosway always arranged his subjects, and for which he was renowned. In this collection it is seen that the artist seldom varied his backgrounds, save by a slight difference in clouding or mingling blue and white. No matter what the style of the sitter's beauty, the backgrounds were always of this same pale, white-infused blue softening into blue-infused white. Sometimes the sitter's head was relieved against the white, sometimes against the blue, but rarely otherwise. This was practicable at a time when everybody with any pretensions to fashion, and thus to being painted by Cosway, was as blonde as hair-powder and rouge could make them. Everybody must have been beautiful too, with that certain expression of mixed pertness and sentimentality which we always recognize as of the eighteenth century, or else the miniatures lie. Cosway was not fond of rich colors, and his subjects are usually in white or the hues of the palest gems. This gives his works their jewel look, as if made principally of turquoise and pearl.

Mr. Joseph's collection has a portrait of the actress, Miss Farren, one of the few with unpowdered hair. Another is of Georgiana, the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, with a child in her arms. There are also miniatures of the artist himself and of his lovely wife. That of Cosway is interesting for more things than one. It is interesting as a departure from his usual practice of color, being painted all in gray, both costume and background. The effect is the tenderest, most delicate grisaille. It is also interesting as indicating something of the artist's revolutionary sympathies of which some of his biographers speak, and might pass

in costume for a citizen of republican France. The face is pert yet serious, and must have been well flattered. For although Cosway was called a "dapper, well-made little man," his face was said to look like a monkey's, and the likeness was a prolific source of witticism to his envious fellow-artists.

The knowledge of Cosway's personality does not enhance the interest in his works. He came of respectable parents—his father was master of the public school at Tiverton, in Devonshire, where he was born in 1740. Developing a decided talent for drawing when a boy, he was sent to London, where he was placed, first under Hudson, with whom Reynolds studied, and next under Shipley, who kept a drawing-school in the Strand. By the time he was twenty-four he had won five premiums from the Society of Arts. A contemporary of his writes that "he was employed to make drawings of heads for the shops, as well as fancy miniatures, and free subjects for snuff-boxes for the jewellers, mostly from ladies whom he knew, and from the money he gained, and the gayety of the company he kept, he rose from one of the dirtiest of boys to one of the smartest of men." His peculiarities in dress and habits made him the source of much ridicule by his brethren. Caricaturists loved to satirize him as the "Macaroni Miniature Painter." He had expensive tastes and he gratified them without restraint. His rooms were crowded with curious weapons, historical armor, rich draperies, old books, and carved furniture. This, we know, is nothing uncommon for a successful artist nowadays, who regards such studio accessories almost as essentials; but in Cosway's time they were considered an affectation. Doubt-

less, though, it was less through this amiable taste for *biac-à-brac* than it was on account of the notorious manner in which he toadied to persons of fashion that this very vain little man made himself ridiculous. "It was his pleasure," Cunningham says, "to spend his money in the society of high and dissipated people who laughed in secret at his folly, and while they encouraged his extravagance to his face, derided it without mercy behind his back. They swallowed his champagne, gambled him out of the

price of a dozen miniatures at a sitting, and then entertained their friends by giving caricatured accounts of his conduct and conversation." Cipriani used to relate, that though Cosway would pass a whole night, nay nights, in this kind of frivolous society, he never found him in bed, let him call ever so early next morning. He rose

with remorse at heart; labored hard by day to repair the waste of the night; and formed, all the while, good resolutions, which dispersed of their own accord when the lamps were lighted, the hour of appointment reached.

Still Cosway managed to keep up his reputation. Although he was content to remain king of miniaturists, and to please the ladies of fashion with the prettiness of his work, it must be admitted that he was a very accurate and graceful draughtsman. He was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1771. The names of some of the pictures he sent to the exhibitions there—"Portraits of a Lady and her Son in the Character of Venus and Cupid;" the "Madonna and Child," portraits; and the "Portrait of a Young Lady in the Character of Psyche"—are sufficiently characteristic of his most serious undertakings. As Cosway advanced in years he became vainer than ever. The loss of the use of his right hand made him irritable, and but for the loving care and sympathy of a faithful wife, herself a miniaturist of ability, his closing years would have been unhappy indeed. He lived to be eighty years old. In the churchyard in the parish of Marylebone, where his remains are buried, may be found the following extravagant epitaph:

"Art weeps, Taste mourns, and Genius drops the tear  
O'er him so long they loved, who slumbers here.  
While colors last, and time allows to give  
The all-resembling grace, his name shall live."

Cosway painted for his century, not for all ages. His pretty, unthinking faces are interesting to us simply as shallow prettiness of another time than our own, but they have no soul in them, and without soul neither artist nor



MINIATURE BY COSWAY.



MINIATURE BY COSWAY.



MINIATURE BY COSWAY.  
COMMANDER BOND, ROYAL NAVY.



MINIATURE BY COSWAY.

subject is immortal.

The illustrations of this article are the actual sizes of the miniatures. Our artist, Mr. Camille Piton, has succeeded admirably in conveying the character of the originals, their delicacy especially. The Joseph collection, we may add, includes other miniatures than those of Cosway. These we shall notice later.